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Report of Interrogation: No. 5877

16 November 1945

I/O: Capt. Halle

P/W: HILGER, Gustav  
Rank: Counsellor of Embassy  
Unit: Foreign Office  
Capt'd: 19 May 1945, Salzburg.

Veracity: Believed reliable.

Report: Answer to Periodic Intelligence Questionnaire; MIS Sep-Oct 1945.

Question USSR #9: To what extent is it true that anti-Semitism has risen in the USSR, especially in Leningrad?

Answer #9: Anti-Semitism in Czarist Russia was an artificial phenomenon, which was furthered by the government for political reasons in order to draw the attention of the masses away from abuses at hand. From this came the infamous "Pogroms" in which the Czarist police regularly took a hand. Insofar as one can speak of anti-Semitism in Russia, it was limited to the so-called "settlement district" (Russian: cherta osedlosti), i.e. that area in which the Jews were allowed to settle and where the majority of the Russian and Polish Jews were forced to live together en masse. These areas were the former Congress Poland (Poland after the Congress of Vienna in 1815) and several provinces in western and southwestern Russia which now belong to White Russia and the Ukraine. But even in these areas before 1905 when a number of changes for the better were introduced, the Jews were not permitted to settle on the land but had to remain in the cities and "Flecken" ("Spots" - small and even tiny towns), where they engaged in small trading, worked on commission, or did manual labor.

In other parts of Russia, and especially in the large cities, Jews were allowed to settle down only if they had had a complete or partial academic training, or had been taken into the 1st guild of the merchants. The first-mentioned condition was impossible of fulfillment as Russian high schools were closed to Jews; the latter was very difficult because of the high fees and other limitations. Positions in the state and in the officers corps were closed to Jews as a matter of principle. The Mosaic confession was the criterium used in establishing whether a man was Jewish, as the majority of the Russian Jews held fast to that and it was not easily possible for them to change over to the Christian religion.

The Russian is basically not anti-Semitic. Nor did the difficult economic situation of the Jews in the settlement area tend to produce either envy or hate towards the Jews. Insofar as such sentiment appeared in the open, or took the form of violence against the Jews, they were artificially encouraged by the government and the Greek-Orthodox church. The progressive Russian intelligentsia refused to have anything to do with anti-Semitism and declared it to be the quintessence of the darkest reactionism. Only in Congress Poland, where the Jews played an important role in the economic life, was there any antagonism on the side of the Polish.

The Bolshevik "October Revolution" of 1917 lifted all the limitations on the Jews in the areas ruled by the Soviet government. They

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received complete freedom of movement and full rights of citizenship. The Soviet government questioned neither one's origin nor religion. Many Jews played an important role in the October revolution, and were named to leading posts in the Soviet Republic (Trotzky, Sverdlov, Kamenev, Sinovev, Unslicht, Tomsy, Kaganovich, Litvinov, Radek, and others). Thanks to their native intelligence and mental agility, their tireless zeal for work, and their better knowledge of language (most Jewsspoke or understood at least German), which in general were superior to the Russians, they attained numerous posts in the Peoples Commissariats and in other Soviet bureaus. Especially in the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the percentage of Jews in the first 10-15 years after the 1917 revolution was very high. It did happen that there were some expressions of anti-Semitism at this time. There was no question, however, of any kind of anti-Semitic outbreak as propaganda in the Soviet Union forbids race hatred and it was punishable by the most severe measures.

The participation of Jews in high and secondary positions in the State gradually decreased, on the one hand, because many more Russians reached the corresponding stage of education and had the necessary qualifications to fill such posts, and on the other hand, because during the struggle against the "Trotzkyites" many Jews fell a sacrifice to Stalin's purge.

After the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 many Jews were evacuated from the western parts of the country to the east and to central Asia. It is known that the local population received them with mixed feelings, comprehensible enough, considering the needy condition of the inhabitants and the great lack of housing. To P/W's knowledge, there have been no other more important examples of anti-Semitism. Nor has P/W heard anything of there being noticeable currents of anti-Semitism today in other parts of the Soviet Union, and especially in Leningrad. In P/W's opinion there is no cause to think that this is so at the present time.

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